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MOLDOVA

SUCCESS STORY

Saving Energy Raises Firm's Revenues

American entrepreneur shows fruit dryers ways to increase efficiency



Volunteer Jim Valentine (right) and Moldovan fruit dryer Vasile Camerzan test a converted drying oven.

"I have worked my entire life in the food processing industry and thought I knew everything about it. One day with Jim Valentine demonstrated that there is room for improvement," said Vasile Camerzan, director of the Camedones Fruit Drying Company in Moldova.

Telling Our Story
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Twenty years ago, the Camedones cooperative would have been one of Moldova's main suppliers of dehydrated fruits and vegetables to the Soviet Union. However, with the Soviet collapse, open markets have brought in a flood of cheaper products. Now, after a period of abandonment and disrepair, the Moldovan drying industry has been experiencing a revitalization brought on by dedicated entrepreneurs.

Jim Valentine, a food processing expert from California, witnessed this gradual transformation firsthand. Jim first came to Camedones in late 2005 as a volunteer with a USAID program to train Moldovan fruit dryers in modern drying technology. He found Soviet-style drying tunnels that consumed too much energy and were too labor intensive. But he also found a cooperative that was willing to take a chance on foreign technology, in the hopes of lowering costs.

From Jim's observation, the Moldovan processors needed to take energy conservation into consideration, as a third of their production cost was energy consumption.

Following his recommendations, the cooperative redesigned its drying operations, using energy-efficient American technology that operated on direct gas heat versus indirect heat radiated through an oven.

These improvements in drying technology yielded a 50 percent savings in natural gas costs and 20 percent savings in electricity costs, while also speeding up processing time. The benefit from these improvements impacted a total of 565 farmers who supply raw material to the cooperative, 13 permanent employees and 65 seasonal workers. The cooperative's revenue increased by 100% to nearly \$100,000, which allowed it to double worker salaries.

Within two weeks, Jim trained over ten fruit and vegetable processors in modern dehydration technologies and provided advice on how to optimize their production costs.

Photo: CNFA/Jim Valentine